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OPENING STATEMENT

REP. CURT WELDON

CHAIRMAN, MILITARY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

JOINT HEARING ON AIR FORCE R&D PROGRAMS

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I would also like to welcome our witnesses, Secretary Delaney and General Plummer. Thank you for being with us today and I'm looking forward to your testimony.

As part of our continuing series of joint Procurement and Research & Development Subcommittee modernization hearings, we want to examine the status of the Air Force R&D request for fiscal year 2001. Mr. Chairman, I will keep my opening remarks as brief as possible, but I do want to highlight some of the concerns raised by members of the R&D Subcommittee and I hope we can address some of these concerns with our witnesses today.

I expect much of today's testimony will be very positive. I'm pleased with your progress with a number of R&D programs such as precision munitions and new technologies such as advanced sensors being inserted in existing Air Force platforms.

As I reviewed your prepared statement, Secretary Delaney, I did find cause for concern in some areas that are very important to members of this committee. I noted your comment that the Air Force is a "major contributor to DOD's tiered architecture to counter the ever-growing theater ballistic missile and cruise missile threats". I, for one, had always shared that view, but I also took note of your description of your "balanced modernization program" which has only 7% of your \$34.6 billion in modernization funds shared between theater missile defense and other weapons, while 93% apparently goes to traditional Air Force programs such as F-22, JSF, C-17, and a number of other current systems. I find this small share of missile defense funding disturbing.

This Committee has demonstrated strong bi-partisan support for missile defense modernization requirements and I want to state my concern for recent Air Force decisions related to missile defense. We were greatly disappointed by the actions taken to reduce funding and slow down the SBIRS high and Low programs in last year's budget request, and the manner in which those decisions were irreversibly implemented without consultation with Congress. The cuts to these important elements of the missile defense architecture will have a negative impact on other missile defense programs. While this Committee fought to keep the Airborne Laser program fully funded in last year's budget deliberations, I now find in this year's request that the Air Force has drastically cut the Airborne Laser, the other major Air Force contributor to missile defense, by over 50% and slowed the program by 5 to 7 years.

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I don't believe these actions indicate a strong Air Force commitment to our nation's missile defense. I can assure you that we will be closely examining Air Force priorities related to missile defense during this year's process

I also noted that while your Chief of Staff, Gen Ryan outlined over \$3.5 billion in Air Force funding shortfalls for fiscal year 2001 in his letter to this Committee, only a handful of those unfunded priorities were R&D programs. I am concerned by this absence of unfunded R&D priorities, unless the Air Force is telling Congress that you are confident that your budget request for R&D is in fact fully adequate. In particular, I am constantly told by House and Senate members that the Air Force funding of Science & Technology is well below necessary levels and reflects a lower percentage of R&D funding than either the Army or Navy. During today's hearing I welcome evidence of a stronger Air Force commitment to missile defense and any comments you may have on the absence of unfunded R&D priorities in your FY 01 budget request.

I also want to highlight one other smaller, but important issue, and that is the ongoing Air Force activity to improve your fighter aircraft ejection seats. Last year, Congress provided additional funds, I believe \$12M, to aid both the Air Force and the Navy to Joint Ejection Seat Program and intended those funds to be equally divided among all viable competitors to ensure fair competition for future Air Force and Navy ejection seat requirements. It has been brought to my attention that these funds are not in fact being equitably distributed among all viable industry candidates and I would like to know more about how the Air Force is conducting this program and ensuring fair and equal treatment of potential competitors.

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